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SUBJECT: TURKEY: DAVUTOGLU STEPS FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN
INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

Classified By: Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: Ahmet Davutoglu's May 1 appointment as Foreign Minister has raised many questions about the future of Turkish foreign policy. As Senior Prime Ministry Foreign Policy Advisor, Davutoglu created a new paradigm that broadened Turkey's traditional Western orientation to include a deeper level of engagement with the Muslim world. This approach solicited heavy criticism from some within the MFA and particularly staunch secularists in the media and elsewhere, some of whom accused the administration of attempting to undermine Turkey's secular state. With Davutoglu as Foreign Minister, many question whether these two camps can exist under one roof and which world view will prevail. For the most part, however, the MFA seems to have accepted its new leadership. Many of the rank-and-file diplomats look forward to having a minister who clearly has Prime Minister Erdogan's ear and whom, they hope, will spend more time engaging the Ministry than did his predecessor. Others are optimistic that co-opting Davutoglu into the system will balance some of his more controversial behavior. Critics, however, remain skeptical, citing what they consider his naivet and simplistic understanding of European and Middle Eastern politics. This is the first of two cables examining Davutoglu and his influence on Turkey's foreign policy. End Summary.

The Architect of Turkish Foreign Policy

12. (C) The Western-oriented secularist MFA and Turkish General Staff (TGS) have dominated most Turkish foreign policy decision-making for decades. Their global outlook mirrored Cold War hostilities with nearly all Turkey's neighbors and reflected a singular focus on Euro-Atlantic institutions, albeit with uniquely Turkish coloration. Furthermore, the threat of military coup prevented politicians from touching upon core "Kemalist" tenets involving policy toward Cyprus, Armenia, or the Kurds. (Arguably, these Kemalist, named due to their identification with founder of the modern Turkish Republic Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and his policies, were happy to keep these "frozen conflicts" going to perpetrate a "state under siege" ala 1923, and thus a state too threatened to allow a full democracy -- which would challenge their entrenched and lucrative positions and perks.)

13. (C) When the Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party

(AKP) came to power in 2002, then-Senior Foreign Policy Advisor Davutoglu established a new paradigm entitled "Strategic Depth." Davutoglu envisioned Turkey as a regional, if not global power built upon "zero problems" with all its neighbors. As a spring board into the region, Davutoglu orchestrated rapprochement with Syria and capitalized on this foundation to expand Ankara's role in the Middle East. This new direction solicited opposition from the MFA and TGS, which accused the AKP of attempting to undermine Turkey's westward orientation and replace the secular state with an Islamic one. (NOTE: Many senior MFA and TGS officials have come to appreciate the merits of regional engagement, namely the enhanced credibility it has brought Turkey. END NOTE)

14. (C) Davutoglu's world view is heavily influenced by a sincere and personal sense of solidarity with the Muslim peoples. AKP top leadership share his vision and ideology, as well as a desire to advance the international business interests of their Central Anatolian support base, including the Fethullah Gulen Movement. While never elected to political office, Davutoglu's star is directly tied to the AKP and he is a true believer in the party. Although his primary goal is to expand Turkey's international influence, it is all done with a strong belief that the AKP is the best actor to achieve such a result.

Davutoglu's World View

15. (C) An academic by training, Ahmet Davutoglu is considered a leading member of a new generation of Muslim scholars who

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assert that Islam can provide a basis for modern government and has written that Turkey's future falls within the "Muslim Bloc." Critics label him a neo-Ottomanist with an overly romanticized view of Turkey's place in the region; an accusation he heartedly refutes. Nevertheless, during the hand-over ceremony with outgoing Foreign Minister Babacan, Davutoglu outlined his vision for a new proactive foreign policy centered on the Balkans, Caucasus, Middle East, the Mediterranean, and the Gulf. "Beyond our representation of 70 million (Turks in Turkey), we owe a debt of responsibility to all territories where there are Turks and where we have had contact in the past." He added "Turkey must take on the role of a country which institutes order in the region."

16. (S) Many Turkish and foreign officials have expressed concern about Davutoglu's naivet, arrogance, and lack of understanding of political realities. Egyptian Ambassador El Hadidi (not an unbiased observer given Davutoglu's scathing criticism of Egypt's Gaza policy) told us that Davutoglu has an erroneous notion that all Islamic struggles are similar; i.e., Hamas would reject violence if afforded the same opportunities as the AKP to participate in a democratic process. Other Arab and Israeli diplomats have also commented on his overconfidence that Turkey would be able to influence radical organizations, citing Davutoglu's self-assuredness that Hamas would allow him to successfully negotiate the release of Israeli soldier Shalit following Turkey's strong stance against Israeli actions during the Gaza crisis. On the European front, Davutoglu displays similar misperceptions. He recently said that an increasing Turkish role in the Middle East will "force" reluctant European political leaders to drop their objections to Turkey's EU membership. One European diplomat argued that such statements, combined with GOT objections to newly appointed NATO SECGEN Rasmussen's candidacy, only escalate concerns in Europe that Turkey's loyalty is shifting to the Muslim world from the West.

Sphere of Influence

17. (S/NF) In his work as Senior Foreign Policy Advisor,

Davutoglu has focused primarily on the Middle East, and to lesser extent the Caucasus, Central Asia, Africa, and the Balkans. During that time, he increasingly played the role of "shadow foreign minister" on issues related to the broader Middle East peace process, including Lebanon and Syria, and Iraq. Reflecting frustration with this interference, many at the Foreign Ministry have come to refer to him as "Nizam-ul Muluk," (translation: administrator of the realm) alluding to the Seljuk viziers who exerted influence on malleable sultans. Despite rumors of friction, however, senior Foreign Ministry officials remain lead players in Davutoglu's efforts. MFA Deputy Undersecretary for the Middle East Feridun Sinirlioglu accompanied Davutoglu on all his trips to Damascus, Cairo, Tel Aviv, and elsewhere in the region during the Gaza crisis. PLO Ambassador in Ankara Maarouf described Sinirlioglu's duty as two-fold. First, he prevented Davutoglu from deviating too far off script. Second, he provided institutional memory so that if things went awry, the MFA could unequivocally place blame with the Prime Ministry. Nevertheless, Sinirlioglu and Special Envoy to Iraq Murat Ozcelik assure us that contrary to rumors, both are fully in-charge of policy execution with Davutoglu playing the role of front man. Neither subscribes to Davutoglu's ideological motivations and Davutoglu is careful not to blur the lines. Ozcelik once told us, however, that he fears that the success of Davutoglu's foreign policies will help bolster support for the AKP -- something Ozcelik does not want to see.

Spheres of Indifference

18. (C) Keenly focused on his priorities, Davutoglu has shown conspicuously less interest to date in non-Muslim issues including Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Cyprus, or energy. He has stated "The European Union and the U.S. are the most important pillars of Turkish foreign policy," but has substantively paid little attention to either during his

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tenure at the Prime Ministry, especially the EU. (NOTE: Davutoglu has, however, regularly made himself available to a wide array of visiting USG officials, academics, and other Americans. END NOTE) He will need to increase his engagement with these regions as Foreign Minister, although the extent remains unclear, especially with the recent decoupling of EU portfolio from Foreign Ministry, which included transferring the GOT EU Secretariat to Prime Ministry and appointing Erdogan-loyalist Egemen Bagis as lead negotiator vice former-Foreign Minister Babacan. Nevertheless, Davutoglu is not beyond playing a greater role if it serves to further his primary interests as is evidence by his tepidly received recent statements about Turkey's EU membership and the Minsk Group, which seem to be aimed more at scoring points with the domestic audience than reaching accord with international capitals. It is also yet to be seen whether this academic will have the management skills to run the entire MFA bureaucracy and deal effectively with the numerous secondary foreign policy issues that will inevitably cross his desk.

Whether the New Foreign Minister?

19. (C) Comment: Ahmet Davutoglu's ascension to Foreign Minister represents a confluence of the Prime Ministry and MFA agendas. For the moment, Davutoglu appears inclined to merge the two, but a relationship built upon mutual suspicion cannot flourish. Some at the Foreign Ministry are optimistic that, by placing Davutoglu in an official position of power, he will become directly responsible for his actions and that his intentions will become more transparent. Others welcome his appointment as someone with influence over both PM Erdogan and President Gul, pointing to Babacan's relative lack of political prowess as one of the reasons for the MFA's diminished role.

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